

# *preservation* **issues**

NEWS FOR THE PRESERVATION COMMUNITY

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

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## Brick Treasures from the Past

*"Anyone who wants to know about early 19th century German domestic architecture should plan to visit not Germany, but Missouri, where good examples still abound." — Erin Renn*

German immigrants did not leave their homeland with the intention of giving up their cultural identity; rather, they brought as much of it with them as they could and duplicated what they had left behind whenever possible. The architectural record they have left us is an omnipresent illustration of that desire. Their legacy surrounds us, but few people understand how exceptional and unique this ethnic contribution is.

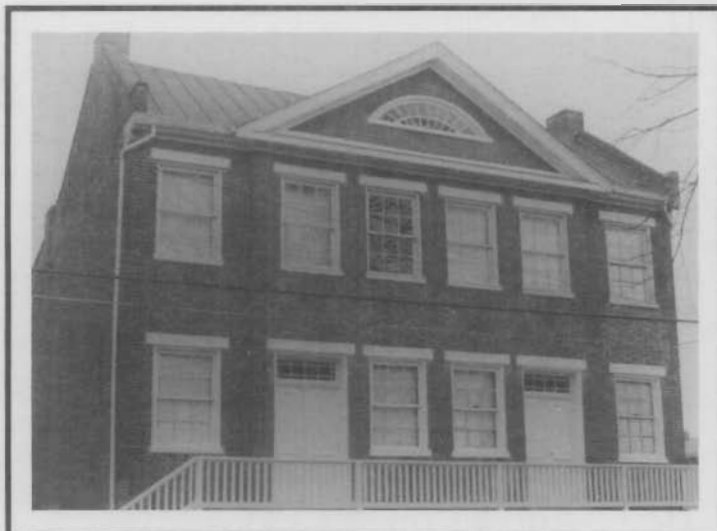
Where suitable clay deposits could be exploited, brick became the dominant and longest-lasting feature of townscapes in Missouri's German settlements. Though brick houses, outbuildings, and barns were also built in rural areas, by far the greatest number of structures survive in towns such as Hermann, Washington, and Ste. Genevieve. Boonville's German-built heritage has suffered heavy losses in recent years. Jefferson City was once filled with German brickwork, but now sadly it is almost gone, and St. Louis loses more of its 19th-century German neighborhoods every year (though a recent trend in rehabilitating old Sottard blocks is a heartening development).

Brick houses that survive from the 1830s and 1840s reflect a severe Neoclassicism labeled in German *Klassizismus*. This is a restrained and simplified style in its own right, quite without

the elaborations identifiably essential to the more familiar Federal and Greek Revival (and the British Georgian) variants of Neoclassic architecture. *Klassizismus* can be recognized by a symmetrical facade, straight lintels of stone or painted wood over doors and windows (the white lintels forming a straight line giving something of the effect of a string course) across the building's front; double doors with an astragal to cover the gap between the leaves, and temple-fronted dormers with applied wood trim. Most are further distinguished by simple brick dentiling under the eaves, and the larger houses have an imposing roof pediment set into the long axis of the house, parallel to the street, and containing a sizable lunette window, just as in Germany. Lunettes appear on many structures of the era and are a common feature, which was carried over into

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*The Pommer-Gentner House, ca 1840, in Hermann well illustrates the German Klassizismus or Neoclassical architecture. Identifying characteristics include the symmetrical facade, straight lintels over windows and double-leaf doors and a large pediment at the roof line containing a lunette window.*



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*This Hermann dwelling (ca 1858) illustrates once prevalent casement windows, although these are a 20th century restoration. The double-leaf doors with applied panels (far left) are probably original. Note the second story balconies on both buildings.*

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German vernacular architecture, as were the temple-fronted dormers. Severely horizontal transom lights, that band of glass panes above an entrance, were placed over doors. German Neoclassical builders tended to ignore fanlights, and the true arch of the Palladian window does not come into their construction vocabulary until after the Civil War and is not common then. Sidelights were occasionally included, such as are seen on Federal houses, but these are more usual on later vernacular structures. Two-story houses have a slightly elevated central section matching the width of and visually reinforcing the pediment above. The temple front thus suggested is a one-brick-deep extension, and so casts little shadow and therefore has somewhat limited definition, unlike the visual drama to be found on its Georgian or Greek Revival cousins.

Where a Federal or a Georgian house would have attached pilasters, quoins, or other elaborations at the corners, a German Neoclassical house did not. There was a deliberate simplicity, a stoic austerity in the application of decorative elements, paralleled in furniture and interior design. When compared with Anglo American or English models of Neoclassicism, German taste

resulted in an overall image that carried restraint to the point of understatement. The result was a subtle balance of Neoclassical elements brought intact from high-style upper class German taste to the New World, but somewhat watered down to fit the purse of the frontier middle class. Lunette windows, dentiling, massive hand-carved doors,

and other decorative wood trim saved the whole from complete austerity. The horizontal lines of the rectangular white lintels against the red brick facades form strong contrasts, and on a handful of surviving houses white string courses add additional emphasis.

The horizontality of the facade elements was balanced by parapet endwalls soaring upwards, paired chimneys topping each parapet, and the triangular shape of the broad central pediment which faced the street. These facades have a pleasing rhythm which has endeared German Neoclassicism to passersby for generations. The roof with its 45 degree or steeper pitch adds to the overall Germanness of the building. (Anglo-American roofs were flatter.)

In Germany dormers designed to resemble small temple fronts, hand-carved double doors with astragals and imposed panels (applied to the front and rear of the door and not mortised in), large lunette windows in otherwise unadorned pediments and strongly defined lintels over windows and doors were characteristic of small-town domestic Neoclassicism in Hanover, Oldenburg, Westphalia, Lippe-Detmold, Hesse-Kassel, Hesse-Darmstadt, and some areas of the Lower Rhine and northern Eifel regions south and west

of Cologne. In these regions that contributed most of Missouri's German intellectuals and professionals in the early years, such buildings can be found today in brick, stucco, or timber-frame, constructed from 1770 to 1840. As in Missouri, all were designed to have working shutters; unlike Missouri, most of the Neoclassical houses in Germany still do.

By the later 1840s, *Klassizismus* began to be replaced by the developing German Vernacular style, which was to be constructed with only minor variations into the 20th century. Delicately carved stone trim work, first seen in a few of the more elegant 1840s Neoclassical houses, was an embellishment that avoided the limitations of a particular style's design cannons. A few German Vernacular buildings have sculpted keystones inserted into brick lintels, or fancy stonework placed into an otherside unadorned wall. Owls, flowers, or geometric designs can be found, as can some human faces. What one does not see is the characteristic single- or double-wedge keystone shape emphasizing the middle of a window surround, such as is typical of high-style Federal architecture. And where a Federal stonemason might emphasize the curve of a window's upper arch with white stone springers at the point the arch begins its curve, German stonemasons working in the Vernacular style ignored the design possibilities of springer voussoirs as perhaps too dramatic, too emphatic.

Parapet walls and classically influenced dormers carried over into German Vernacular, but straight white lintels gave way to curving brick, and the later in the century the house was built the more an arch is apt to be found above windows and doors. Brickmasons became more free in their use of decorative bands under the eaves, and often introduced projecting string courses between floors, or between the eaves and the upper windows. Sometimes these string courses were shaped to follow the lines of curving window surrounds, giving the appearance of



*The White House Hotel, Hermann, constructed as a "first class hotel by Gottlieb Rippstein in 1868-69," exhibits typical German Vernacular segmental arched windows and brick lintels with limestone keystones. The shutters are operable and may be original. Note also the window-doors opening onto the iron balcony.*

beetling eyebrows. As a further embellishment, if three courses of brick trim were employed under the eaves, the middle row was often of brick fired to a black or blue sheen, self-glazed in the kiln.

Again, this parallels developments in Germany at the same time where, if anything, brickwork became even more exuberant and fanciful, borrowing from the late North German Medieval brick traditions with which cities like Hamburg abounded. This can be spotted on domestic architecture, but is even more obvious and omnipresent on churches on both sides of the Atlantic.

Another characteristic of vernacular brick construction was the adoption of a cast-iron or wood balcony centered on the front of a two-story five-bay house. An upper door or window-door opened onto the balcony, or, as in one docu-

mented late 19th-century Hermann store, onto nothing at all. These vernacular buildings were as rigidly symmetrical as the earlier Neo-classical ones. They were usually two rooms deep and two rooms wide with a center hall. A variant on the theme was the side hall house with two or three stories two rooms deep. The latter have the same street frontage but far larger rooms. Both util-

ize floor plans that can be readily found throughout central Europe.

These Missouri-German houses often had an ell on the back, extending

the available living space, and some had second-floor galleries creating a connected covered space within the shelter of the ell. In Germany, if a single-family dwelling grows back into its lot, the form is apt to be a courtyard surrounded by the house on all four sides, with the galleries running around the entire two or three levels and serving as a partially exposed hallway to the additional rooms, all of which open onto the galleries. In a predominantly cool climate the courtyards functioned well, but for North America's far longer and far hotter summers courtyards were not a good idea. They became heat sinks. The open L plan made more sense, and is an Americanization of the German floor plan.

Shutters and the frequent installation of casement windows in preference to sash completed the mid-19th century German look. The shutters are still with us, but many casements have been torn out, possibly because they looked too foreign for the Midwest; the fact that where they can still be found

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*One of a number of excellent examples in Hermann, this vernacular cottage, ca 1872, exhibits segmental arched windows and lintels, double end chimneys and Classical, pedimented dormers.*



# MISSOURI

## Historic Architecture

### German "Fachwerkbau" (Half-Timbered Buildings) ca 1830s-1870s

#### Characteristics:

- Foundations are stone; cellars are common.
- The structural system is Medieval post-and-girt – heavy corner and widely spaced intervening posts with cross timbers forming a series of square openings in the structural wall.
- Timbers were heavy white-oak logs squared with a broad axe and fastened with mortise and tenon joints secured with wooden pegs.
- Each timber was marked with an incised Roman numeral indicating its exact location in the completed structure.
- The open spaces between the heavy supporting timbers are filled with a variety of materials: traditionally, daub

(clay) was applied over wattle (lath made of woven wooden sticks) and finished with a covering of hard gypsum plaster stucco or, more common in Missouri, the openings were filled with nogging of brick or stone.

- Most Missouri examples are today covered with non-original siding in a variety of materials.
- Roofs were generally steeply pitched and gabled.
- Original roofing materials were probably straw thatch or pantiles (clay tiles) although no examples of these survive in Missouri. Many were re-roofed with metal beginning in the late 19th century.
- House and church interiors in Missouri were often decorated with two favorite colors: "Prussian" blue (made with cobalt pigment) and a bright salmon pink.



PHOTO OSMUND OVERBY



PHOTO THOMAS TOLLES

*The Kothhoff-Weeks House, ca 1850-61, near Hermann is an unusually intact example of a German Fachwerkbau dwelling. Occupied by only two families for more than 100 years, the house has few modern amenities and largely retains its original historic appearance, including Prussian blue paint on interior walls. The exterior walls of the house were sided with weatherboard at some point in its history, except for the front wall, which is protected by a full width porch. This wall well illustrates German Fachwerkbau or half-timbered construction. Notice the wooden-pegged mortise and tenon joints and the incised Roman numerals, which designated the correct placement of each of the oak timbers.*

# A Future for Hermann's Rotunda

PHOTO CLAIRE BLACKWELL



*The Rotunda, ca 1864, in Hermann was constructed to house horticultural exhibits and wine trials at the annual Gasconade County Agricultural Fair.*

One of Hermann's most significant and distinctive historic buildings is the Rotunda, an octagonal brick structure located in the city park. But this once-proud focus of the annual county agricultural fairs has been sadly neglected in recent years. While the city park is actively used for recreation and special events, the Rotunda has served as little more than a crumbling reminder of a distant past. Recently, however, the city, in recognition of the unique importance of the Rotunda to Hermann's ethnic and agricultural heritage, has earmarked scarce budget dollars for stabilization of the building.

The Rotunda was built by the Gasconade County Agricultural Association in 1864, part of the flurry of construction activity spurred by the impact of a burgeoning winegrowing industry. The industry, which began in Hermann in the 1840s with the encouragement of the town trustees, soon spread to the surrounding countryside. In celebration of the vintage year of 1848, the town held its first "Weinfest." Annual wine trials, wine-judging events that offered a monetary prize for the best wine, encouraged production

and competition. By the 1860s the industry was flowering, with a great percentage of the farmers in and around Hermann growing grapes or making wine. The growing industry demanded specialized facilities, such as wine cellars, press houses, and exhibition areas, and winegrowers seized the opportunity to construct substantial brick and stone structures. The Gasconade County Agricultural Association had been formed in 1857, one of the first to be established in Missouri. Its early membership reflected an impressive roster of pioneer winegrowers, notably George Husmann and William and Michael Poeschel. Husmann had established one of the state's first horticultural nurseries in Hermann in 1857, and Michael Poeschel would establish the Stone Hill Wine Company in 1864. Like Husmann and the Poeschel brothers, most of the association's members were from the winegrowing area in and around Hermann, resulting in an emphasis on horticultural pursuits, rather than the broader range of agricultural activities. By 1870, the association had 240 members, the majority of whom were winegrowers.

The association held annual fairs and offered premiums to encourage improved produce. Activity and growth continued despite the disruption of the Civil War – the annual fairs continued, and in 1863 the association purchased slightly more than six acres for permanent use as a fairground. The association's First Annual Report confirms the Rotunda's 1864 construction date and indicates a cost of \$1,800.

Although built with typical materials and solid German craftsmanship, the Rotunda is a unique property in Hermann and the surrounding winegrowing region. Its octagonal form and pavillion roof with double stacked cupolas and fanciful jig-sawn trim create a unique and distinctive image.

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*"The Hermann fairs are generally a jovial and merry gathering of all the lovers of pomology, and, especially, grape growing throughout the State, and even draw many of the same class from other States." – Gasconade Co. Agricultural Association Minutes*

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The Rotunda served as the exhibition hall for the annual fairs. It provided a location for horticultural exhibits and a permanent home for the wine trials that had begun in 1850's. The fairs were festive events that attracted visitors from near and far. To encourage visitation, the association organized special excursion trains between Hermann and St. Louis. The association minutes gave a positive report on the fairs' success: "The Hermann fairs are generally a jovial and merry gathering of all the lovers of pomology, and, especially, grape growing throughout the

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State, and even draw many of the same class from other States."

Prohibition effectively brought an end to the prosperity and way of life of the heyday of the Hermann winegrowing industry. With the decline in the wine industry, interest in the fairs declined as well. In 1923, the association sold the Rotunda and grounds to the City of Hermann for \$4,000.

In 1951, a major rehabilitation of the Rotunda was undertaken by the Brush and Palette Club, a community organization with a strong appreciation of Hermann's German heritage. The building was refurbished to accommo-

date theatrical productions, such as community Maifest pageants. For many years it served a major role in the community.

In recent years, the Rotunda has been little used. Although a number of community groups have presented ideas for reuse, there has been no clear consensus on its future use, ownership, or funding. Engineering studies have identified some major structural problems that must be corrected before it can be opened for public viewing or use. Recently the city of Hermann made a major commitment to preserve the building by appropriating \$18,000 for needed sta-

bilization. Priority work will include correcting the structural deficiencies that have caused the exterior brick walls to twist and the exterior corners to crack. Once the structural work is completed, the city will examine possibilities for reuse of the structure.

The city's decision to commit scarce funds to stabilize the building represents a major step forward. The city has asked the Department of Natural Resources' Historic Preservation Program for advice and assistance, and we hope that we can proceed from this very important first step to developing a plan for long-term preservation of the Rotunda. — *Claire Blackwell*

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is on the backs or hidden sides of houses suggests this. However, one place where casements survive and thrive is in the small attic windows squeezed in by chimneys, where German builders took one-half of a sash window and hung it as a single casement. Those can be found everywhere, adorning the older structures and still functioning as they were intended to.

Though in Germany fairly large and substantial 19th-century middle class vernacular brick houses can be found in considerable numbers, brick cottages of the size so frequently seen in Missouri, with five or fewer rooms, cannot. In Germany such cottages were the homes of working-class people, laborers, artisans, and fisherfolk, and sprang up on the outskirts of growing industrialized communities from about 1810 through the 1880s. Nineteenth century urban sprawl coupled with the casual destruction of World War II's strategic bombing has virtually eliminated these small dwellings in the Homeland.

Anyone who wants to know about early 19th-century German domestic architecture should plan to visit not Germany, but Missouri, where good examples still abound. The finer specimens of tiny Neoclassical dwellings were built for professionals and university graduates compelled to live on a much-reduced scale on the frontier,

compared with the comfort they had known in their former central European homes. The Neoclassical brick laborer's cottage of Germany, duplicated virtually unchanged in the Midwest, became Americanized in the sense that it was spiritually transformed into a classless affordable example of *Klassizismus*. Members of the middle class who would not have dreamed of living in something deemed "workers' housing" in Germany were intensely proud of the same designs transferred to the United States frontier in the new towns that they were creating along the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. Transplanted German Vernacular experienced the same democratization when erected in the Midwest.

Both styles remain the most visible part of a transplanted heritage brought to the New World from the Old. Our German brick heritage is something of which

we can be proud both for its scarcity in the lands of its origins and because the buildings are remarkably handsome and worth appreciating for themselves alone. — *Erin Renn*

*Erin Renn, who holds a Ph.D. in 19th Century European Cultural History, has been the administrator of the Deutschheim State Historic Site since 1984. Renn came to Hermann from the University of Maryland where she taught both history and art history.*



*Although typical in most respects, this German Vernacular cottage, ca 1858, features atypical facade window detailing. Both lintels and sills are of elaborately molded wood; the window surrounds are also molded and double-beaded as well.*



# Hermann: A Short History

**H**ermann was settled in 1838 by shareholders in the German Settlement Society of Philadelphia. German-society colonies had been established previously in Missouri, but settlements in St. Charles, Franklin, Perry, and Warren counties had failed to endure since proximity to "Americans" eventually weakened the identity of the German community.

The German Settlement Society, aware of the failures of other organizations, was founded to establish a German town "in isolation" where the advantages of the frontier could be realized, yet the Germanic culture would be allowed to remain unimpaired. The concern of the Settlement Society to retain old world traditions represented a conscious rejection of American culture, which many Germans felt to be overly materialistic and therefore inferior to their own. But their ambiguous attitude toward America suggests that if society members had come to regret their decision to settle in the new country, they nevertheless were not ready to forsake the material pleasures of American life. The society's choice of a townsite in rural Missouri is therefore

significant since the members assumed frontier life could provide the necessary isolation for maintenance of traditions.

Although it is not known exactly why a Missouri site was chosen, the river location, relatively low price of land and proximity to St. Louis were probably factors, as were idealized accounts concerning Missouri's wealth and abundance, especially those of Gottfried Duden.

The society's plan for Hermann reflected the promoters' faith that their town would someday emerge a great city. In spite of Hermann's very irregular topography, the new town was platted in a Philadelphia-plan grid. Hermann's Market Street was to be ten feet wider than Market Street in Philadelphia and only substantial houses were to be constructed. Although Hermann

eventually did prosper, the insistence upon valuable homes and gridded streets demonstrates the ignorance of the leadership concerning hardships on the frontier.

A few settlers arrived during Fall 1837, and were soon followed by a larger migration of persons. At first the society controlled town government and colony residents were forbidden from petitioning the County Court for incorporation. During 1839 it became obvious the Philadelphia office could not effectively

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*(Top photo) This front-gabled commercial-residential building, ca 1859, Hermann, housed owner and builder Hermann Schlender's general store on the first floor and his family on the second. Note the classical lunette window in the gable end.*



*(Bottom photo) The Strehly House (ca 1860) and Winery (ca 1850s) is part of the Deutsheim State Historic Site in Hermann and is open to the public. Visitors will especially enjoy the nicely interpreted interior.*

## PSF Grants Awarded

The National Trust for Historic Preservation's Preservation Services Fund (PSF) is an important financial assistance program designed to encourage preservation at the local level by providing seed money to stimulate preservation projects. The PSF can be used in a variety of ways. Among other preservation activities, the matching grants can assist with planning costs for restoring historic property, preparing heritage education programs; or organizing conferences and workshops.

Several Missouri groups were recently awarded PSF grants:

Soulard Community Housing Corporation, St. Louis, \$2,500 for a feasibility study and financial analysis of four structures to be rehabilitated for single-family homes in the Soulard Historic District.

City of Creve Coeur, \$1,500 for preliminary architectural drawings, plans and specifications for interior restoration of the 1880s Tappemeyer House.

Lafayette County Commission, Lexington, \$1,500 for analysis and recommendations for the repair of the timber frame roof of the 1847 Lafayette County Courthouse.

Old Stagecoach Stop Foundation, Waynesville, \$750 to determine structural improvements and stabilization measures needed for the ca 1857 Old Stagecoach Stop building.

Missourians who are interested in applying for a PSF grant should call Tim Turner at (312) 939-5547.

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Missouri Department of Natural Resources  
Historic Preservation Program  
P.O. Box 176  
Jefferson City, MO 65102

## Dates to Remember

**Route 66 Association of Missouri** annual cross-state motor tour, Sept. 24-25. For more information call Jim Powell at (314) 982-5500.

**American Association of State and Local History** annual meeting, Sept. 29-Oct. 1, Omaha, NE. This year's theme is "Thriving on Change: Redefining the Field of State and Local History." Call Lu Anne Sneddon (615) 255-2971 for more information.

**Three Trails Craft Show**, Oct. 15, Alexander Majors House, Kansas City. Contact Ross Marshall for details at (816) 333-5556.

**Missouri Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Meeting**, Nov. 4, Jefferson City. For more information, call Margaret Barnes at (314) 751-5365.

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administer town government. Society members in Hermann at once recognized the impracticality of fine homes and wide streets in a frontier settlement, and the society's aspiration to build a rival to St. Louis appeared unrealistic to those on the frontier. The society eventually relinquished control of government in 1839.

Population growth in Hermann virtually stagnated from 1840 until the introduction of viticulture during the decade and the completion of the Pacific Railroad in 1854. By 1850, most of Hermann's 930 residents were employed in the flourishing wine industry. In addition,

by 1850, Hermann had emerged as a major shipping port for iron produced in the Meramec River area, 60 miles to the south, and in 1842, Hermann secured the removal of the county seat of justice.

Until the 20th century, with the coming of tourism and light industry, Hermann remained a relatively stable community subsisting upon the commerce of the wineries and the trade of neighboring farmers. And the Hermann National Register Historic District remains today a superlative example of German town development in Missouri.

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Editor: Karen Grace  
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